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Rolling Thunder spirits in peak form

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Although Bob Dylan walked on stage in ghostly white make-up and is shrouded more than ever in mystique, his Rolling Thunder Revue was the most personal show he has ever mounted.

As one of its guest stars, Joni Mitchell, mentioned, "It's like running away to join the circus."

This is a travelling roadshow of singers, musicians, readers, freaks and poets; no other rock extravaganza that's played the Forum has conveyed this old-timey tradition of sharing songs with one another for 4½ hours.

The artistes all beamed exhilaration at being there. These elders of the folk and rock generation seemed to be playing out their lives as an open book, engaging in their own personal fantasies and roles — all under the scrutiny of the omnipresent movie camera.

There was Mitchell, a rose in her hair, long legs wrapped in denim, singing a song-in-progress, entitled Coyote, celebrating a love affair she's having on the tour.

There was Ramblin' Jack Elliott and his 10-gallon stetson, blearily

Joan Baez

stumbling out of the folk dustbowl and captivating the crowd of 20,000.

There was a Radiant Joan Baez, singing a song about re-meeting Dylan after all these years.

And there was Dylan himself, with new songs about his wife and marriage. Memories burned bright with the unfolding experiences.

Bob Dylan

Dylan waltzed through the whole family scene, sometimes conveying gestures of offhand intimacy with his troupe, other times seeming wrapped obliviously within himself. Everyone watched his moves. When not singing, he ambled about — appearing to almost tip over in a drug fog one moment, and at another, stepping with the grace of Astaire.

Joni Mitchell

His voice sounded more shot-to-hell than ever, yet Dylan holds our attention, more than any other vocalist, with the improvisational creativity of his style. He gets inside the cadence of phrases. He rolls out words with the manner of a country singer, a hipster, a cantor, a poet.

His first song, When I Paint My Masterpiece, was rendered in a jarring arrangement, as if to break us from preconceptions. There were new ways to sing old chestnuts: It Ain't Me Babe, a dramatic version of The Death of Hattie Carroll; a chant-like invocation of Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall, with its final declaration, "And I'll know my song well before I start singing". He introduced a new tale, Isis, conveying the cool lyrics with theatrical handflapping and facial gesticulations.

He snuggled up for duets with Baez, at once laying bare the emotions between them, as well as haughtily ignoring them, and soaring in I Dreamed I Saw St. Augustine and I Shall Be Released.

He had the stage for himself on It's All Over Now Baby Blue and Tangled Up In Blue, leaving the audience hushed. And he rejoined the musicians for the climax, his brilliant scorching narrative on the murder frame-up of boxer Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter.

Dylan was on stage longer than previous concerts over the years, but he also sought to place his art within the perspective of a multi-faceted musical revue. Everyone in the show got their best shots in and despite the length of the performance, there was such a wide variety of music that things never lagged.

Bobby Neuwirth strummed like a fake Robbie Robertson in absentia, so congenial is that hip shitkicking style. British guitarist Mick Ronson pranced about like an elf, effortlessly oozing forth slick licks, given much more opportunity to hit the spot than when he backed Bowie.

Original Byrds leader Roger 'Jim' McGuinn cut loose with electric 12-string guitar raga-rock trips. Bassist Rob Stoner was an extroverted steadying influence on the large tight band, which handled any amount of instrumentation with ease. Scarlet Rivera raved fiendishly on electric violin. Ronee Blakley, star of the film Nashville, sang on the choruses, possessed by the proceedings, and touching the audience with a country lament.

There were dedications and remembrances of Janis Joplin, Joe Hill, Jesse Winchester, Leonard Cohen and Hank Williams. The great beat poet, Allen Ginsberg, drifted out of the audience to add his finger-bells to the entire troupe's finale of This Land Is Your Land.

The spirits were there, the night Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue rolled into town.

Jazz takes to the high season with luxury cruises

Although Jazz has often been wrongly tagged as elite music, there is no denying that some members of the elite are hooked on it — in style. To prove the point, this month will feature, for some privileged fans, two jazz cruises on luxury ships.

The remaining millions of us plebeians will have to be content reading about it, but we can rejoice all the same at the newly acquired lettres de noblesse.

The fourth Jazz Cruise on the SS Rotterdam leaves New York for Nassau and Bermuda Dec. 13. It returns Dec. 20.

On board, the line-up will provide swinging fare with singer Billy Daniels; the Stan Getz quartet; Woody Herman and the Herd; Ahmad Jamal and his quintet; James Moody and the Orchestra; singer Sarah Vaughan and her trio; and pianist-composer-historian Leonard Feather.

There is another cruise which is going to be dearer yet, at least to one Montreal, mostly because he'll be making some of the music.

Sadik Hakim has just become the pianist of tenor saxist Buddy Tate's new quartet. Their cruise leaves New Orleans December 9, for two months. They'll jazz it up all over the Caribbean, Mexico and Panama. Some gig!

Sadik is so excited at the prospect that he doesn't know either the name of the ship or the names of the other groups who'll be on board. All he knows is that he is ready. Since he played for about three years with the Buddy Tate Orchestra in the late Fifties, it's bound to be a friendly reunion anyway.

In fact, Montreal might lose Sadik for much longer than this one cruise. He just came back from New York which is swinging more than ever, as he reports, and he was offered work at the Vanguard and the Tin Palace when he comes back from the high seas.

Drummer Alvin Queen is also temporarily away from his new home, Montreal. He's in Europe, touring with trumpeter Charles Tolliver. That, too, is a nice break and Alvin will be back before Christmas.

Jazz raps
by Nighthawk

Home front

Anyone talking to our local musicians would get several versions of the same blues. It's called the no-local-club-blues. There are a few places, mind you, who will book jazz artists but the pay is generally very poor, the gigs ill publicized, and the attitude less than professional in what is, after all, a business.

Local groups manage to get a booking here and there, build a following and then for some reason or another, it's all over. Andy Hozzay's group, for instance, played at Pancho's on Bleury for a couple of months each Monday night. The pay was practically symbolic, but the exposure was good, and the band was building a nucleus of fans.

But the Musicians Union cannot allow its members to work under these conditions. Members are required to work for a certain minimum, and not allowed to work in a club which hires non-union members and pays them below scale. This whole thing is a vicious circle, and until someone becomes serious about a local jazz policy our musicians will be forced to remain ostracized.

The various statements that Montrealers do not support their local musicians are, to my mind, unfounded.

The truth is that local jazz musicians haven't been given a chance for many years. I mean a respectable chance with a good room, a good sound system, comfortable seats, publicity and decent pay. If these conditions were to be met, I have strong doubts that the audiences would stay away on the principle that the musicians are Canadian. So far, what has been stated as truth might be only a myth in the mind of promoters who lack faith — in fact.

But, and that is good news indeed, Canadian universities are waking up and young ears are tuning in to the many refinements of what is undiscriminately called jazz, whether it dates back to 1900 or to last week.

Université de Laval booked drummer Guy Nadon's group last month. McGill had guitarist Ted Quinlan's sextet and Sadik Hakim's trio. Marianapolis had Michael Gregory Jackson. University of Ottawa had Brian Downey, Vernon Issacs and Norm Clerk.

Interest is building — slowly maybe, but steady — and jazz audiences around town are getting younger all the time. Young or not, they are hearing the different styles of jazz and finding new sounds to grow with. Some of the young people I talked with are even digging their parent's 78s out of basements. Since some of their peers are also playing jazz in high school, college, and conservatory bands, music appreciation is bound to widen its scope and veer from eye appeal to ear judgment — or from hype to the nitty-gritty.

Rainbow Bar And Grill, 1240 Stanley offers the group of vibraphonist Lee Williamson Dec. 7, 8 and 10. Stephen Barry's Blues Band will play two dates Dec. 21, 22 and 23, and again 29, 30 and 31.

The Rising Sun, 298 Ste. Catherine W. features Jane Fair's group Dec. 11, 12 and 13. Other dates unconfirmed.

McGill offers two events this month. Dec. 9, The Canadian Saxophone Quartet in a classical/jazz mixed program. Dec. 16, the Jazz Improvisation Class of pianist Armas Maiste. Both concerts at 8:30 p.m. at Pollack Hall, 555 Sherbrooke. Free admission.

Regular jazz groups are consistently featured at the following:

Cafe Mojo, 4109 Park Avenue. Thursdays through Sundays. Reeds and percussion with Sayyd and Sons.

Cafe Prague, 1431 Bishop. Fridays only. Dixieland with The Jazz Knights sextet.

Cock n' Bull Pub, 1946 Ste. Catherine W., Dixieland with the Al Peters sextet.

Rockheads Lounge, 1252 St. Antoine, every night but Monday, guitarist Ivan Symonds and his trio.

As usual, top U.S. jazzmen, Tuesdays through Sundays at **In Concert:** Dec. 9, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis big band; Dec. 16, Jack DeJohnette with John Abercrombie; Dec. 23, Elvin Jones. Freddie Hubbard is there till tomorrow night.

Happy Holidays.

Critic comes 'out of closet'

By MARIANNE GALLAGHER
for The Gazette

Dr. Leslie Fiedler has come "out of the closet."

No, the internationally- known scholar, professor and critic of American literature isn't talking about his sex life.

Instead, at a recent lecture at Concordia's Loyola campus, Fiedler declared his love for Margaret Mitchell's novel Gone With The Wind.

It's an admission many academics may regard as nothing short of heresy. Fiedler, the author of Love And Death In The American Novel, confessed that "it took me 36 years before I could admit this to myself, let alone make it public knowledge."

Fiedler said the definition of "literature" held by many critics and scholars involves excluding books such as Mitchell's civil war romance.

"The intellectual elite consider these books to be the sub-literature of 'low art' — a classification which differentiates 'their' literature from the popular novels read by the gross many."

Fiedler argued that the intellectuals refer to the literature and other art forms which represent their own domain as "high art" — available to the chosen few through intelligence, education and dogged persistence.

Although he formerly held the same convictions, Fiedler stated that he no longer recognized or approved of such class distinctions in literature.

He now refers to 'high art' as "minority literature" (read by the intellectual few) and 'low art' as "majority literature."

"A book, be it minority or majority literature, should be judged on whether it effectively reaches that which is deepest in all of us and whether it will continue to do so in succeeding generations."

True literature, Fiedler said, will survive, and is always relevant in some form or another.

In an interview, Fiedler gave a personal illustration of his point. Having to read a book on animals for a school project, his eleven year year old son had chosen Moby Dick. Curious, Fiedler asked him why he had chosen that book. "Somebody told me it was just like Jaws," his son responded.

According to Fiedler, the concept of high art is partially explained by the protestant work ethic:

"It is ingrained in us to think that nothing is worthwhile unless we work for it. And let's face it, it takes sheer determination to get through the likes of T. S. Eliot and Henry James."

Fiedler sees nothing wrong with the "unearned pleasures" and "instant gratification" afforded by majority literature, films and T.V.

"Society is in a state of controlled sanity and has a great need to release repressed impulses in moments of total self indulgence — a substitute for the loss of primitive experience."

Smile brings relief to '30s art show

By JOCK IRELAND
for The Gazette

Down came the big Quebec 75 show and up went Canada 1930 at the Musee d'art contemporain last week.

Canadian Painting in the Thirties is the traveling version of a larger show presented by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa last spring. Fifty-five of the original 100 paintings survived the cut.

How to paint

Landscapes by A. Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer and Lawren Harris are in the show, but interest in simply reproducing the Canadian landscape declined during the 30s. Lismer gave up painting for teaching. Harris became more and more abstract. His White Triangle (1936) is in the show. Emily Carr's three paintings are more visionary than representational.

LeMoine FitzGerald and David Milne were more interested in how they painted the landscape than in the landscape itself. They are well represented by three paintings each.

There's only one painting by Edwin Holgate in the show — Interior (1931). But a one-man show of his paintings will come to the Sir George Campus of Concordia University in mid-February.

Remember the evil woman who tried to bump off Robert Redford in The Sting? Paraskeva Clark's Self-Portrait (1933) might remind you of her. But there's more to the beautiful woman in the painting than there is to the stock character in the movie.

There's a wonderful kind of self-assurance about her — a kind of knowing openness. She's pregnant. But isn't she stylish in a hat, a black dress? The neckline of her dress is casually alluring. Look at her big right ear. She has a smile on her face.

Great relief

What a relief a smile is in this show. A climate of fear and resignation pervades so many of the paintings. Jack Humphrey's humorless portraits, Charlotte (1929) and Edith White (1928), portraits of children, are really creepy.

Paraskeva Clark's Petroushka (1937), also in the show, was painted in response to the 1937 clash between striking steel workers and the Chicago police. Robert Coover's new story, Whatever Happened to Gloomy Gus of the Chicago Bears, in the American Review #22, revolves around the same incident.

Coover's story is told from the point of view of a young sculptor living in Chicago in 1937. It's about the sculptor's relationship to the social and political issues of his day. This was an important question for many Canadian artists in the 30s. Coover deals with it more vividly than does Charles Hill in his scholarly catalogue for the show.

We should remember that Canadian artists had a tough time in the 30s. Here is Jacques de Tonnancour writing about Goodridge Roberts: "He had five teeth, his strength for several months . . . and survived. He had supported his painting and had been able to give it life. That had been enough for him and had carried him through. He was a painter; that was his strength." Roberts has two paintings at the Musee.

Canadian Painting in the Thirties runs through Jan. 4.

Self-portrait, by Paraskeva Clark

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